Office of the Assistant Attorney General   *Washington, D.C. 20530*

May 13, 2004

The Honorable John Conyers, Jr.
Ranking Minority Member
Committee on the Judiciary
U.S House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515-6216

Dear Representative Conyers:

Thank you for your letter dated March 30, 2004, to Attorney General Ashcroft supporting the interoperability of voice and data communications of State and local first responders. An identical response is being sent to Chairman Sensenbrenner, who co-signed your letter.

The Department of Justice has worked diligently for years to address the communications challenges that face State and local first responders. Since 1994, the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) has awarded over $1.2 billion to over 4,500 law enforcement agencies for advanced technologies and equipment. Last year, COPS awarded more than $66 million specifically to address growing communications interoperability needs through the COPS Interoperable Communications Technology grant program. This funding is helping communities develop effective interoperable communications systems for public safety and emergency services providers. The program will pay part of the costs associated with the purchase of law enforcement technology. The technology will help sworn law enforcement officers perform community policing functions in the areas that they serve and enhance their ability to respond to emergencies through improved information sharing.

The COPS Office partnered with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) during the planning, delivery, and management phases of the program. COPS and FEMA collaborated on the grant program to maximize the strategic impact of the funding that was available for interoperable communications equipment. The program funded demonstration projects that explore uses of equipment and technologies to increase interoperability among the law enforcement, fire service, and emergency medical service communities. These projects are the result of thorough and rigorous planning. They demonstrate how new technologies and operating methods can help communities achieve interoperability.

The COPS Fiscal Year (FY) 2004 Interoperable Communications Technology program will provide grant funding to continue to improve the effectiveness of public safety communications systems and to assist in resolving interoperability issues. In crafting the FY 2004 Interoperable Communications Technology program, the COPS Office will coordinate with the Office of Justice Programs, the National Institute of Standards and Technology, and the DHS SAFECOM Program.

Through a competitive grant program, COPS plans to provide funding to local law enforcement jurisdictions for projects that will explore uses of equipment and technologies to increase interoperability among the law enforcement, fire service, and emergency medical service communities. The projects will illustrate and encourage the acceptance of new technologies and operating methods to assist public safety communities in achieving interoperability.

This program will continue to expand on the work that is already underway to support interoperable communications, including SAFECOM Program efforts and planning guidance developed by the National Task Force on Interoperability to assist States and local governments with achieving interoperability. The activities funded under this competitive grant program will be the result of thorough and rigorous planning. Grant applications should demonstrate how these activities will help State and local agencies achieve interoperability among the law enforcement, fire service, and emergency medical service communities, as well as how these efforts will facilitate and enhance mutual aid efforts.

The Office of Justice Programs (OJP) has two major, long-standing programs to assist first responders with interoperable communications, namely, the Global Justice information Sharing Initiative ("Global") and the National Institute of Justice's (NIJ) Advanced Generations of Interoperability for Law Enforcement (AGILE) voice communications interoperability program.

The Global program promotes information sharing among criminal justice agencies. It is of utmost importance to ensure that first responders have the best possible information at the scene of a critical incident. In particular, law enforcement officers require data interoperability and information sharing in order to deploy assets, identify individual criminals and terrorists, and employ probative or intelligence information. In many cases, State and local law enforcement are the last line of defense against terrorism prior to an attack. More efficient sharing of data among criminal justice agencies leads to more effective day-to-day law enforcement, improved counter-terrorism, and more effective operations for first responders. To this end, Global brings together a "group of groups," representing more than 30 independent organizations spanning the spectrum of law enforcement, judicial, correctional, and related bodies. Global aids its member organizations and the people they serve through a series of important initiatives. These include: policy development; training; development of technology standards, such as the Global Justice

XML Data Model, Version 3.0; creation of white papers on data sharing issues, such as the National Criminal Intelligence Sharing Plan; technology development; and the dissemination of information via the Global Web site (www.it.ojp.gov). Global's work is used by all of the Department of Justice's information sharing programs, including the COPS Interoperable Communications Technology Program and the DOJ Chief Information Officer's Law Enforcement Information Sharing committee.

Through NIJ's AGILE program, the Department of Justice develops technology solutions to solve both short and long term interoperability problems involving wireless public safety telecommunications and information technology applications. This multi-faceted program involves research and development, testing and evaluation, standards development, and technology support to State and local public safety agencies. Among other major successes, AGILE developed the National Task Force on Interoperability, which developed baseline requirements and policies for State and local public safety interoperability. AGILE also provided critical test, demonstration, and evaluation of the switching technologies that are now widely used across the nation. These switches, like the ACU-1000, provide basic, regional interoperability solutions on a very cost-effective basis. AGILE also managed the development of systems like CAPWIN, the Capital Wireless Integrated Network, which provides public safety agencies in the Washington, D.C., metro region with mobile data capacity. For more information, please refer to the AGILE Web Page: http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/nij/sciencetech/ciis_proj.htm.

In general, to ensure that OJP's counterterrorism research efforts complement rather than duplicate those of other agencies, OJP has established an extensive set of interagency agreements and informal working relationships with DHS, the Department of Defense, and several other Federal agencies. For example, NIJ and the DHS Science and Technology Directorate are negotiating a Memorandum of Understanding to formalize the informal coordination that currently exists between the two agencies' research and development efforts. DHS focuses on technology dealing with chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear threats, while NIJ's mission focuses on day-to-day criminal justice technology needs, especially on the State and local levels. Of course, these missions relate in specific areas, especially when law enforcement's response to terrorism is involved.
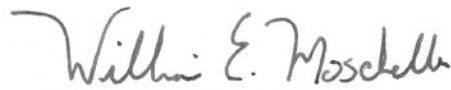
The AGILE program has closely coordinated its planning and oversight with the DHS SAFECOM program. Unlike SAFECOM, AGILE chiefly works to address the development of new communications technology, day-to-day law enforcement needs, and information sharing. For example, the Global initiative and AGILE develop XML standards for data interoperability. Those standards will help build better wireless data networks that will give police officers on the street criminal history information in real time. The programs also support other Department of Justice initiatives in interoperability, such as the Major Cities wireless program and the COPS Interoperable Communications Technology grant program. These programs use best practices, standards, grant guidance, and technical assistance coordinated by SAFECOM and AGILE.

DHS' interoperability grant programs, primarily through the Federal Emergency Managementb Administration and focused on public safety responders other than law enforcement, have also used these SAFECOM and AGILE resources.

Thank you for your letter on behalf of first responders. We appreciate your interest in the Department of Justice's efforts to address the issues of interoperability. Please contact this office if we can be of further assistance on this or any other matter.

Sincerely,

William E. Moschella
Assistant Attorney General